DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 664 SO 021 634

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TITLE Social Studies, the Student, and the Teacher.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Educational Objectives; Elementary School Curriculum; Elementary Secondary Education; Secondary School Curriculum; *Social Studies; Student Educational Objectives

ABSTRACT

Four issues concerning the social studies curriculum are raised and discussed in this paper. The first addresses the matter of scope in the curriculum. It is recommended that the student be the focal point in determining scope. Next, it is asked whether the goal of social studies should be that of preparing students for life or of helping students learn decision-making skills in present day situations. Active involvement in the classroom is encouraged. The third issue discussed is subject centered versus activity approaches in teaching the social studies. Activity centered methods of instruction are favored. Lastly, the question is asked whether it is more desirable to seek to adjust the student to the curriculum or to adjust the curriculum to the present achievement level of each student. The latter approach is supported. (DB)

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SOCIAL STUDIES, THE STUDENT, AND THE TEACHER

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SOCIAL STUDIES, THE STUDENT, AND THE TEACHER

Selected issues are apparent in the social studies. Issues need identification as problem areas. These problems need clarification with related solutions sought. Adequate data from a variety of reference sources need to be utilized to provide clarity of perception pertaining to both or several sides of the issue. Ultimately a hypothesis needs to be developed to resolve the identified issue(s). The hypothesis needs to be tested in actual teaching-learning situations.

An issue that continues to be in evidence pertains to what (scope) should be taught in the social studies. A vast amount of subject matter has accumulated pertaining to history, geography, political science, anthropology, sociology, and economics. The content therein has been evaluated and appraised in terms of relevance and significance. Academicians in their academic areas of specialty have identified subject matter perceived to be salient. Textbooks, workbooks, audio-visual materials, and other reference sources contain social science content for teachers to utilize in teaching, as well as for students to acquire. Individual differences among learners need adequate provision so that each might attain optimally. A logical curriculum is in evidence if the social studies teacher arranges sequential objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures for students.

Toward the other end of the continuum, the social studies teacher selects adequate concrete, semi-concrete, and abstract materials for different learning stations in the classroom. With student-teacher planning, the former chooses which (scope) objectives to attain and

which to omit. Learning opportunities are chosen by students based on personal interests. Immediate interests and purposes of the learner become paramount. Students are also heavily involved in determining how achievement is to be appraised. Meaningful content from the social science discipline is emphasized based on what each student perceives is relevant. A learner centered social studies curriculum is then in evidence.

The writer recommends the following in terms of synthesis:

1. Pupils with teacher guidance being heavily involved in problem solving in the social studies. Subject matter acquired relates directly to the chosen problems. Facts, concepts, and generalizations achieved are instrumental to the solving of problems. Subject matter and identified problems are not opposite ends of the continuum, but relate to each other. The former then provides needed content in developing solutions to problems.

2. Learners being adequately involved in determining scope in the social studies. With student involvement, increased purpose in goal attainment should be a relevant end result.

A second issue pertains to students in school preparing for life versus learners being presently involved in life's endeavors. The social studies may emphasize preparation for life. Thus, a predetermined social studies curriculum might well be in evidence. The objectives, learning opportunities, as well as appraisal procedures might have been developed by educators on the state level. These state mandated objectives are then available for teachers to implement in the social studies. District wide instructional management systems with its measurably stated

objectives also represent a predetermined social studies curriculum. No input from students is in evidence in these plans of instruction. The local teacher teaching the social studies may have had very minimal or no input into the state mandated or district instructional management system (IMS). A hierarchical social studies emphasis is then present in the school curriculum. Students are being prepared for life and the adult world with a social studies program that is external to the learner.

Toward the other end of the continuum, students may well be heavily involved in curriculum development. With a contract system in a social studies unit, the student with teacher guidance may select learning activities to complete. The activities are clearly written in the contract for a student to complete. A committee may also spell out the learning activities to pursue to fulfill the contents of the contract. The due date together with the signatures of the involved student together with the teacher make up the total contract.

A predetermined social studies curriculum is definitely not inherent in a contract system. Rather, an open ended social studies curriculum is in evidence. Thus, considerable flexibility is involved in the objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures in the social studies. A psychological curriculum in that learners sequence their own activities in a contract is in evidence.

With heavy involvement in ongoing social studies units, students are making major choices and decisions presently. Increased responsibilities need to be given to students to select from among alternatives. Decision-making needs to be emphasized continually in the

social studies in order that improvement in these skills occurs continuously. Presently, learners are actively involved in decision-making rather than preparing for the future to make choices in the adult world.

To synthesis a predetermined social studies curriculum with its emphasis upon preparing students for the future versus a contract system stressing learner decision-making presently, the writer recommends:

1. the teacher guiding students to assume increased responsibilities for their very own behavior. Self-evaluation by the student is salient.

2. the preparation for life philosophy be reduced to make room for student decision-making in the here and now.

Third, should a subject centered or an activity centered social studies curriculum be in emphasis? This issue pertains to a rather heavy use of reputable basal textbooks being utilized by the social studies teacher in guiding students to attain goals. Thus scope and sequence are inherent in the basal textbooks utilized. Writers of the social studies basals have selected what (scope) pupils are to learn, as well as sequence of learning experiences. Illustrations within each unit in the textbook assist students to clarify that which is presented in the abstract. Maps and globes pictured in the social studies textbooks guide students in the location of places being studied, as well as in understanding other content directly relating to geography. Tables, charts, graphs, and time lines contained in the textbook provide situations for students to acquire content rather quickly as compared to the vast amount of reading that would otherwise have to be done by the learner.

Prior to reading from the basal textbooks, the teacher should provide readiness experiences. These include:

1. guiding students to see new words in print on the chalkboard prior to the reading activity. When seeing new words in print prior to actual reading, the student should have adequate opportunities to identify each abstract word in a contextual situation.

2. assisting students to secure background information directly related to the selection to be read. Purpose also needs to be stated for the reading activity.

A subject centered approach in teaching the social studies should:

1. provide for individual learners with different levels of achievement of reading.

2. utilize audio-visual aids to supplement the basal text with meaningful experiences.

Somewhat toward the other end of the continuum, an activity centered approach may be utilized in teaching-learning situations. Activity centered social studies stress a learning by doing approach. A project method be utilized. Within the project, a student with teacher guidance develops a purpose or reasons for developing a project. Once the purpose or goal has been determined, the student plans the project. Flexibility and open endedness are two concepts to emphasize in a project method. Next, actually constructing the project follows in sequence. Ultimately, the completed project is appraised by the student with teacher assistance. Quality criteria need to be utilized during the time devoted to appraising the completed project.

Projects to make by learners with instructor guidance include making and constructing models and objects directly relating to the ongoing social studies unit.

In harmonizing the subject centered-- activity procedures dichotomy, the writer recommends:

1. using subject matter knowledge to construct the chosen projects.

2. stressing rational balance between subject matter and project development in the social studies.

Fourth, should the student be adjusted to the social studies curriculum or should the social studies be adjusted to the learner? Numerous reasons are given for adjusting the student to the social studies curriculum. Students need to be challenged to achieve optimally. Thus a learners needs to measure up to the level of instruction presently being emphasized. To lower the level of complexity of instruction merely limits the opportunities students have to achieve. If the level of instruction is lowered, slow learners will not have access to the same subject matter as compared to other levels of instruction. In situations such as these, slow learners are kept in their present status by not having access to the sophisticated subject matter as do the more talented and gifted. Slow learners then have negative labels attached to themselves. By having available the same textbooks and other instructional materials, as well as content for discussion as do faster students, the slow learner may achieve as optimally as any person. It may take a little longer for the slower learners to achieve these facts, concepts, and generalizations. Each students needs to measure up to

higher standards when the learner is adjusted to the social studies curriculum. Objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures need to be challenging and demanding. With high expectations by teachers for students, the latter can attain and understand the complex subject matter.

Toward the other end of the continuum, the social studies need to be adjusted to where each student is achieving presently. The social studies teacher needs to observe, understand, and accept each student's present level of attainment. Thus the teacher may adapt the program to where each student is achieving. Learning opportunities are selected to attain objectives. However, these activities are on the understanding level of each student. Meaningful subject matter is then acquired. Evaluation techniques utilized are to determine if objectives are being attained and what can be done to provide for individual differences in the social studies.

The writer strongly recommends:

1. adjusting objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures to the present achievement level of each student.

2. continuous progress in social studies be emphasized for each learner, after the curriculum has been brought to where each achieves optimally.

In Closing

The writer discussed selected issues pertaining to developing the social studies curriculum.

These included:

1. the scope of understandings, knowledge, skills, as well as attitudes which students need to attain as objectives.

2. preparations for life versus learners presently being involved in decision-making situations.

3. subject centered versus activity approaches in teaching the social studies.

4. adjusting the student to the curriculum as compared to adjusting the social studies to the present achievement level of each student.

The writer recommends the student be the focal point in determining scope, active involvement in the classroom, actively centered methods of instruction, as well as curriculum adaptation to the present attainment level of each learner. Each needs to attain optimally in the social studies.